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# Education and Social Hygiene.

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## I.

THE problem is how education may help social hygiene, and what strikes one first is that the solution must be found by experiment. It cannot be thought out in any armchair, it must be put to the proof, and that takes time. But reflection and discussion may suggest lines of experiment and may indicate the probable pitfalls along various lines. There has already been some experimenting, but positive experimenting has been individual and sporadic, and the results have not been pooled. The biggest experiment has been "DOING NOTHING," and its results are not encouraging.

## II.

What is wrong that we wish to help to put right? Many women live miserable and degraded lives as instruments of man's irregular sexual indulgence. Many men are abnormally sensual. There is much venereal disease. Numbers of both sexes sink into the captivity of bad sexual habits. In many fine types the disharmony of the sex-urge is very marked. Too many men remain in selfish nominal celibacy and in some countries too many women are left unmarried. The greater the numerical preponderance of women over men, the lower the standard of sex-selection tends to sink. Various social conditions operate against reasonably early marriage. The influences of family, society, and religion that work towards clean living and high control have been weakened.

What we have just stated appear to be verifiable facts; the uncertainty is in regard to numbers. But when we pass to the psychical background, we are apt to find ourselves among unverified opinions. It is probable that "love" has suffered considerable materialisation; it is probable that the ideals of chastity, faithfulness, control, and clean-mindedness have been weakened, and that men in particular, even in a country with our traditions, like pleasure more and enduring hardness less than their forefathers did. It is probable that the poetic chivalrous outlook has been not a little dimmed. But it is not easy to prove these statements.

It is difficult to arrange either the objective or the subjective evils in their proper order ; and it is difficult to say when the bodily aspect of the organism leads and when the mental.

### III.

In many simple peoples there are adolescent ceremonies and attempts at sex instruction for both sexes. It is not known whether these are beneficial or not ; they occur in tribes with very different moral habits ; in any case they are too remote from modern life to be of any service except as a hint that our contemporary ancestors have found the need of such measures. In modern civilised nationalities sex instruction has dwindled to a vanishing point, except that there is generalised ethical education in many families and schools, as well as in churches and in literature. The value of ethical education is recognised by all, but there are many wise people who do not favour direct sex instruction.

The arguments against direct sex instruction may be illustrated : it is difficult to instruct wisely ; parents are next to useless, and it is asking too much of ordinary school teachers to lay the responsibility on them ; the school physician, who, if willing, could probably do it best, has not always the educational sense ; there is great risk of anticipating organic interests and promptings ; it is better to let sleeping dogs lie, *if* they are sleeping.

The arguments in favour of some sex instruction may be illustrated : the experiment should get a fair trial, for we surely need to do something ; many young people stumble into bad habits through ignorance ; the ignoring of the subject leads them to get information all discoloured or it engenders morbid curiosity ; it is perilous to trust to "instinctive guidance," for sex promptings in man are blunt-pointed and generalised, they cannot be relied on when there is any difficulty in the path.

### IV.

Using the wider word education instead of instruction, we may say that there are four lines that promise well.

(a) There is the plan of giving sound lessons in physiology—in a physiology that does not ignore the reproductive system and yet does not isolate sex. Let in light and face the facts. Speaking of jesting about sex, Sir William Bayliss writes : "I feel compelled to state my belief that much mischief is done by the habit of looking at anything related to sex as, in itself, a matter for jesting, apart from any real humour. Perhaps the excessive secrecy and reticence maintained on the question are much to blame, and there is no doubt that the wider teaching of a proper physiology in schools will have a good effect in this direction." This hygienic physiology



would be confined to the older pupils, and it would be modified differentially by teachers of discretion. Thus it might not be always appropriate to go into details about sex hormones ; but it could never be inappropriate to explain, so far as we can, what is meant by a habit.

(b) Many teachers have recognised the value of biological nature study in clearing away the clouds that gather round sex. Without spoiling good botany and zoology, much may be done to let open air and sunshine into the whole subject of sex and reproduction. They can be studied in their natural and evolutionary setting, apart from any direct human and personal reference. As Thoreau wisely said : " For him to whom sex is impure, there are no flowers in Nature " ; and in birds, for instance, one can illustrate how love may transcend the sex-urge.

(c) The attainment of wholesome adolescence may be aided by developing external interests, preoccupations, responsibilities and services ; by opening up paths of legitimate excitement—in music and pageant, drama and celebration ; by discipline in self-control, and in enduring hardness. Above all, as Stanley Hall says, develop motor activities ; but, one must hasten to add, develop emotional activities as well. In our own generation the idea of the biological and psychological control of life is being seized and applied with a new hope and a new understanding. No one knows what may not be done in the way of influencing hereditary characters by appropriate nurture. Vigour or " fitness " is an ideal of normal youth—an ideal to be appealed to ; it may be nipped in the bud or it may be made to blossom. Of course, there is no use pretending that healthfulness will necessarily lessen the imperiousness of the sex-urge, but it may help in its control and it will work strongly against its debasement.

(d) Finally there is the preoccupation of the mind with things that are comely, noble, and of good report. It is the empty chamber that the devils enter. We must hitch our wagon to a star. We must link the sex-impulses, regarded as the physical basis of love, to the chivalrous, the poetic, and the romantic. It will not spoil school studies in history and biography that they should show what a powerful lever the noble love of man and woman has been in the world's history. It is an historical and biographical fact that " control and chastity make marriages happy and nations strong, while the *corruptio optimi* is already hell." Much may be done to crowd foul pictures out of our gallery.

## V.

These then are the four educational methods which commend themselves : more and better physiological hygiene, more

and better nature study, a discipline in control, and a pre-occupation with nobility. There is hope in all these four lines of education, and we must have them all. But the question rises whether we have not reversed the order of their power. We have tended to biologism. We have put physiology and nature study in the foreground—we can teach these more directly. But perhaps the most effective appeal is the most indirect; perhaps we should begin with the mind, trying the expulsive power of new affections.

Let us indicate several reasons which suggest that we should trust as much to poetry as to physiology. (1) Clear ideas based on facts are always powerful; as Hegel said, they have hands and feet. But much of our activity is swayed by emotion, and the culture of the emotions is a possibility. Children should be brought up in familiarity with noble lives, great deeds, wise sayings, beautiful pictures. (2) Repression leads to a disunion of life; bodily disharmonies tend to split up the self; hence the great value of any centralising idea or emotion, whether it be religious, or æsthetic, or social. Keep the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. (3) Not necessarily, yet very often, the suggestions of physiological and biological studies are “don’ts.” Don’t become unhealthy, don’t lose control, don’t get disease, and so on. But from experience and from theory alike, we know that “don’ts” are apt to defeat themselves. The powerful lever is a *positive* ideal of health of body and mind, of living at a high level of thought, feeling, and action.

Perhaps our position may seem reactionary, especially for a biologist. But in emphasising the need for more education of the inner life we do not cease advocating physiological and biological teaching. On the contrary we have a definite suggestion to make. The adolescence of many fine natures is like the coming of spring, but for many others it means stormy weather—and there is sometimes shipwreck. It seems congruent with our modern mood of letting in daylight, that those who wish it should have available all that well-established science has to say. We agree with Mr. Wells that it is very undesirable that “the cardinal thing in life” should “sneak in to us darkly and shamefully like a thief in the night.” We agree with Samuel Butler that there has been far too much reticence. “Get all,” he said, “the best opinion of our best medical men, and let us have it out.” But our point is that to this there should be added the best opinion of our best biologists, psychologists, and moralists. Sex at its best is like religion at its best, a reaction of the whole organism—heart, hand, and head. We distrust its treatment solely in terms of metabolism and hormones; we distrust its treatment solely in terms of the Freudian Unconscious; we distrust its treatment solely in terms of society and race. Our suggestion

is that direct verbal sex instruction is so extremely difficult, that the National Council should undertake the preparation of a co-operatively produced book of guidance embodying all the wisdom we have from all sides, and readily available to all who wish it.

## VI.

As joint author, with Prof. Patrick Geddes, of "The Evolution of Sex," published in 1889, I have made a long study of sex, especially from the biological side, and I may be allowed to submit for your consideration three general convictions.

(1) There is a time to embrace, we are told, but there is also a time to refrain from embracing; and both are normal parts of our life. Passion is often imperious, the reproductive hormones are powerful accelerators; but a steady brain is also part of the normal inheritance. It has not been proved that extreme variations in the reproductive endocrinal glands are very common. We do not share the view that sex is such a distinct and dominant factor in ordinary life as some specialists maintain. "Sex" is often made a scapegoat for empty heads, lazy selfishness, and general lack of control. The organism is a unity, and the sex life is inextricably mixed up with the rest of our life. We should not tolerate its isolation—that is the way to disaster. Some people are born with a greater capacity for loving than for fondness, with others it is the other way. Others, again, inherit a sex strand that is peculiarly liable to kink or knot. But in all cases we should refrain from isolating or analysing apart the sex life, as if it were not an integral part of a unity, as if for instance *it* might be indulged without peril to the rest, or as if on the other hand it were not linked to the best that is in us. Our inheritance is more than a bundle of discrete factors (as even the extreme Mendelians now admit); it is an organism—a life. One of the safeguards is trying to refuse to allow the isolation of the sex life. We strongly suspect that some devotees of psycho-analysis are doing harm by bringing into everyday life and conversation a method appropriate to the laboratory and hospital. Ordinary people should be bigger than their endocrinal glands. It is man's prerogative to cultivate his personality—the integration of the organism.

(2) Much that is said about man's sex instincts seems very shaky. Among some humble creatures, such as insects, there are often very definite and complicated reproductive instincts in the true sense. They sweep their possessors through an intricate routine of courtship, mating, and preparation for the young—often never seen. But man is at the opposite pole, for his reproductive and sexual promptings

are very generalised. We have, in regard to sex functions, very little instinctive knowledge of what the various phenomena mean, or of what is normal or of what is to be carefully avoided. Thus, one may slide into bad habits without being at first well aware of what is happening, or, on the other hand, one may make oneself miserable without good reason. It follows that we cannot trust our so-called sex instincts; we must try to command our course. Hence the need of available advice, which is most hopefully to be looked for from a wise co-operative guide-book—not yet written. It does not seem to be contradictory to say, on the other hand, that it is not part of normal experience to have the deep under-currents forced to the surface; the ideal is that they should operate *through* the upper currents of controlled life. And are we not apt to forget the evolutionary aspect of *the unconscious*, that it represents a relegation of the anachronistic to the under-currents of our life?

(3) Those who see large numbers of young people to-day must be impressed with the wholesomeness of the great majority. Most of the exceptions are among those handicapped by a vitiated inheritance or by a blighting environment, or by a low-down tradition in the family circle. Perhaps the last factor is most within our hands for amelioration, and everything that helps towards thinking nobly of love is to the good. The deepest thing that is wrong with us is a materialisation of outlook. Love is the flower of which sex is the root, and what is most needed is a deeper appreciation of the flowers. Then we need not trouble so much about the roots. The sublimation of fondness into love is the outstanding psycho-biological fact emerging from the study of the evolution of sex in the animal kingdom, and it is for man to continue the evolution on a higher turn of the spiral. Health and wealth are indispensables, but they are the pre-conditions of progress on higher levels, in the quest of the higher values. To have men free from venereal disease would mean an enormous increase of power and happiness to the nation, but it would only be a particulate progressive step if these men were more sex indulgent than ever, if the bulk of them were incapable of looking at a woman with eyes of clean admiration. A lifetime is not too long, Comte said, for a man and a woman to get to know one another well and to learn to love one another worthily. That is the way of progress—a heightened tradition of loving. We do not mean that we should think of eugenics less; we mean that we should think of eupsychics more.

## VII.

What practical suggestions have we to make? While there should be a continuance of education in hygienic physiology and in thinking biologically, there must be a change



of tactics in various directions. The needs of the inner subjective life are to be recognised as supreme, though the needs of the body are fundamental. A positive ideal is much more potent than a negative prohibition. In proportion to the subtlety of the desired end should be the indirectness of the appeal. More inquiry should be made into the way in which young people regard sex ; we must not be restricted to the reminiscences of people over sixty. No teacher should ever be asked to do what one would not gladly do oneself. The percentage of parents who can be trusted with the education of their children, except by their daily walk and conversation, is negligible. Partial views of sex, however true, are likely to do as much harm as good. No one man or woman is competent to write a thoroughly satisfactory guide to the adolescent ; the hope is to extract it from a *critical* committee who care more for the race than for one another's feelings. In all modes of sex instruction care must be taken not to anticipate interest ; not to excite ; not to say what is untrue ; not to teach what will have to be unlearned afterwards ; not to make false mysteries, which a short stay at a farm might dispel ; never to deal with the pathological or with sewers ; not to frighten ; not to pretend that men and women are angels ; and, above all, not to say too much.





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